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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 002034

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: PERES: LABOR READY TO JOIN LIKUD COALITION

REF: TEL AVIV 1941

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer for reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Labor Party Chairman Shimon Peres told Ambassador Kurtzer unequivocally April 2 that Labor "could not stay out" of the coalition if and when PM Sharon invites Labor to join. Responding to a scenario where Sharon loses the two right-wing coalition partners over a cabinet vote on unilateral withdrawal and needs to form a new coalition that supports withdrawal, Peres answered rhetorically: "Are we so crazy as to stop withdrawal and settlement dismantlement? This (withdrawal) is what we wanted."

2. (C) As to losing Labor MKs over a decision to join with Sharon, Peres scoffed at any notion that Amram Mitzna would leave, concluding that the only sure defector would be Labor's Avraham Burg, who, Peres quipped, was "beyond recognition." "What happened to him?" Peres asked quizzically.

3. (C) Peres voiced dissatisfaction with the evolving substance of Sharon's disengagement plan, noting that he was disappointed with the "diet" the plan had gone through since it was initially proposed. He asserted that Sharon would not settle for Israeli control over just the three major West Bank settlement clusters, but would seek control over other portions of the West Bank as well.

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